"Come as You Are" Warfare: The Bataan Example

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We're the Battling
Bastards of Bataan,
No mama, no papa,
no Uncle Sam,
No aunts, no uncles,
no cousins, no nieces,
No pills, no planes,
no artillery pieces,
And nobody gives
a damn!

—Frank Hewlett, 1942[1]

In retrospective examination of campaigns and military history, we often look at defeats superficially. We are quick to point out that events occurred because one or more principles of war were neglected or that, in hindsight, it was perhaps inevitable because of inadequate planning or unpreparedness. Yet, we seldom look critically at how underlying reasons for defeat might apply to the present. The Bataan Campaign is a case in point. Although the Campaign was a painful defeat for U.S. forces, lessons learned from the period immediately preceding the Campaign, in the areas of command and control (C2) and logistics, remain critical to 21st-century joint and multinational operations.

For most of the period between World Wars I and II, military planners considered the Philippine Islands indefensible against a determined Japanese attack.[2] Plans for defense of the Philippine Islands were intended to deny the Japanese the use of Manila Bay via limited resistance on Corregidor Island and the adjacent Bataan Peninsula.[3] Initial planning for the Pacific Theater was for a unilateral U.S. campaign against Japan, known as War Plan Orange. (For purposes of secrecy, Japan was designated as country Orange for planning.) In the summer of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's national strategy evolved toward a Europefirst prosecution of the war formalized by the Arcadia Conference in December 1941. The RAINBOW plans (so called because they melded the previous color plans into an overarching strategy) codified this strategy. However, the defense of the Philippines remained essentially unchanged. Defense plans called for a limited action designed to deny the Japanese the use of Manila Bay for approximately 6 months, with an unstated hope that relief could be provided by the end of that period.[4]

In the summer and fall of 1941, the U.S. Army began a shift in emphasis and began to make plans and efforts for a greater defensive role by U.S. forces in the Philippine Islands, a role that could conceivably mount a successful defense. The Joint Army-Navy Board, predecessor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approved this change, although the board did not necessarily change other aspects of the plan to support this new development.[5]

In addition to planning in Washington, a parallel effort was undertaken in the Philippines. As early as 1934, Headquarters, Philippine Department in Manila (HPD), developed an internal defense plan under the Plan Orange scenario. The third plan in this series, revised in 1941, was designated HPD War Plan Orange-3 (WPO-3) and only dealt with defense of the Philippines.[6] The plan called for a three-phase defense of the main island of Luzon. The first phase would be a defense of potential landing beaches, particularly at Lingayen. If the first phase failed to stop an invader, a second phase would begin. The second phase consisted of a timed withdrawal along five defensive lines south to the Bataan Peninsula. Phase three consisted of defensive operations on Bataan and several harbor islands, including Corregidor.[7] Also; WPO-3 called for integrating Philippine forces into the island's defense.[8]

MacArthur Returns

On 26 July 1941, amid rising tensions in the Pacific following Japanese occupation of Indochina, U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur returned to active duty and assumed command of the newly created United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE), and Roosevelt federalized the Philippine Commonwealth forces under MacArthur's command.[9] MacArthur, who had been in the Philippines as military adviser of the commonwealth for some years before being named the USAFFE Commander, regarded the overall tone of HPD WPO-3 as being defeatist in nature. MacArthur considered the defense of the beaches to be critical in stopping a Japanese invasion of Luzon. He emphasized his intent that there would be no withdrawal from the beaches.[10]

A large part of MacArthur's strategy to defend Luzon depended on the ability of commonwealth forces to carry on the fight, despite shortages of equipment and materiel. He envisioned a 10-division-strong Philippine Army (PA) force in addition to the U.S. Army's Philippine Division (unnumbered) composed of U.S. and Philippine Scout (PS) troops. He planned also for a period of training and equipping lasting until April 1942. This timeframe would be used to bolster beach fortifications and supply depots. However, the strike on Pearl Harbor demonstrated that this time would not be available. As a result, the embryonic Philippine Army was not fully trained and equipped when called on to take its place alongside U.S. and PS defenders.[11]

On 8 December 1941, at 0330 in the Philippines, the Associated Press notified USAFFE that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and that America was at war with Japan.[12] Some 9 hours later, Japanese bombers attacked Clark Field on Luzon destroying half

of the Far East Air Force's bombers and about 20 other aircraft on the ground, effectively crippling their strike capability.[13] Following the air strikes, U.S. Asiatic Fleet Commander Admiral Thomas Hart with drew most major surface ships from the vicinity of the Philippine Islands, leaving behind some minor combatants and support vessels.[14] Japan's main attack on Luzon began early on 22 December 1941 at Lingayen in northern Luzon. American and Philippine forces were unable to hold the beach and by 23 December, the Japanese had advanced 10 miles. On the night of 23 December, MacArthur ordered the withdrawal of all American and Philippine forces onto the Bataan Peninsula.[15] U.S. Army Chief of Staff, USAFFE, General Richard K. Sutherland informed the staff the next morning.[16]

Withdrawal to Bataan was haphazard at best. Stores of food, ammunition, and fuel recently pre-positioned forward for the defense of the beaches were abandoned or destroyed in place. Provisions for forces moving into Bataan were incomplete, although ample stores were present on Luzon. Transportation resources were also lacking, so in many cases, only personally carried items were brought with the retreating forces. Almost immediately the forces on Bataan were placed on half rations and by mid-March were subsisting on quarter rations of only 1,000 calories per day.[17]

Troops Dig In

American and Philippine troops dug into defensive positions on the slopes to the east and west of Mount Natib along the Abucay and Mauban lines in preparation for the inevitable Japanese attack. The heights of Mount Natib were rugged and deemed impassable and so were not occupied by friendly forces. On 9 January 1942, Japanese forces began their offensive to take Bataan. American and Philippine forces held until 22 January when the Japanese penetrated the center of the defensive lines by moving up the supposedly impassable Mount Natib.[18] By 26 January, American and Philippine troops pulled back and established a single new defensive line (the Bagac-Orion Line) north of Mount Bataan across the width of the peninsula. Forces were able to repulse a series of early Japanese attacks and some attempted amphibious landings until early March. The Japanese took serious losses in these attacks and withdrew to regroup and reconstitute. On 3 April, reinforced Japanese forces began a final assault on the malnourished defenders. The Japanese breached friendly lines in about 36 hours, forcing the eventual surrender of the Bataan forces on 9 April 1942.[19]

The original WPO-3 had envisioned the defense of the Bataan Peninsula to last up to 6 months before a relief mission could be mounted.[20] American and Philippine forces had held for 4 months—since the beginning of the war—but no relief mission was underway or yet planned. Few supplies made it through the Japanese blockade, and friendly forces, suffering from a variety of diseases, were seriously undernourished from subsisting on ever-decreasing, unbalanced rations. On 6 May, U.S. Army Lieutenant General Jonathan Wainwright surrendered Corregidor and all other American and Philippine forces in the Philippines, ending America's rule until MacArthur returned 2-1/2 years later.[21]

Command and control was of critical importance to Philippine defense, but the C2 arrangement in the Philippines was the least effective imaginable. Although ineffective for the campaign to retain the Philippines, the C2 structure did not violate any of the precepts for a C2 organization. Its ineffectiveness can be traced to a failure to effectively execute the principles that enable C2, a condition often symptomatic of joint and multinational operations today.

Under MacArthur's control were three sector forces consisting of combined American and Philippine forces. Two of these were on the island of Luzon (North and South), and the other was on Mindanao with responsibility for all the other Philippine Islands. In addition, MacArthur had U.S. Army air assets consolidated under Major General Lewis H. Brereton. Colonel Charles Drake was Quartermaster General. Hart operated in support of USAFFE. Ironically, this organization changed several times over the next 75 days. It changed when North and South Luzon forces were consolidated in the Bataan Peninsula, again when the east and west sectors of Bataan were established as I and II Philippine Corps, again when MacArthur evacuated to Australia, and even after that.[22] While this evolving command structure showed some adaptability to changes in the situation, the leadership shuffle itself was a source of confusion.

Even before Japan's invasion of the Philippines, the stage was set for confusion. MacArthur, pushing for a more aggressive defense of Luzon, directed that the beaches were to be held at all costs. On 21 November 1941, the War Department approved his changes to the new Philippine defense plan.[23] MacArthur envisioned that under the new plan defense preparations would be complete by April 1942. He directed that supplies be stockpiled forward to support the beaches. Stockpiles on Corregidor were not to be wholly depleted, but supplies intended for the Bataan Peninsula under WPO-3 were moved forward to advance depots and other key defensive positions.

MacArthur Caught Short

The attack on Pearl Harbor caught MacArthur's preparations short, and he and his staff had to consider the feasibility of a beach defense. It was not until 23 December, however, after the beaches at Lingayen were lost, that MacArthur decided to implement WPO-3. No one had anticipated the potential for withdrawal to the Bataan Peninsula since MacArthur's intent to defend at the beaches had been made abundantly clear. This caught Drake off-guard, with the result that many critical supplies needed to defend Bataan and Corregidor were not in position.[24]

While troops could move quickly into Bataan, their supplies could not. MacArthur's desire to defend at the beaches served as an effective intent statement for Drake and meant that food, fuel, ammunition, and medicine, which should have been pre-positioned in Bataan and Corregidor, were not. Instead, these vital supplies were either in supply dumps to support the beach defense or disbursed to units deployed about the island.[25]

Commander's intent should be written to allow subordinate commanders the latitude to use their initiative to react to a changing situation. Although MacArthur had taken issue with Washington that the Philippine defense plan was defeatist in nature and too restrictive, his own instructions were, in fact, highly restrictive and did not allow his staff and subordinate commanders the leeway to act when the situation became untenable.[26]

Unity of effort was also critical to command and control in the Philippine defense. Under the Naval portion of RAINBOW-5, Hart's mission was to support MacArthur's defense of the Philippines as long as that defense continued.[27] Hart's small fleet consisted of 3 cruisers, 13 old destroyers, 29 submarines, 32 patrol aircraft, and some smaller surface craft. After Pearl Harbor, he focused on his small fleet's survival as a combat force in the Far East. Under RAINBOW-5, his mission gave him the latitude to move to Dutch or British ports at his discretion to protect the fleet.[28] In fact, the Navy's stated purpose under RAINBOW-5 emphasized operations to draw enemy strength away from the Malay barrier. How and when a westward advance of the Pacific Fleet would reach the Philippines was not indicated, nor was there any apparent mention of relief of forces in the Philippines.[29] Shortly after receiving reports of the destruction of Pearl Harbor, Hart moved most of his surface force from the Philippine Islands, leaving only his submarine force and some coastal patrol craft behind under the command of Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell of the 16th Naval District. Hart's intent was to continue to provide MacArthur support with these assets, while preserving his more vulnerable surface ships.

The Japanese were soon able to interdict the sea lines of communications to Manila Bay and almost completely cut off any resupply operations to Bataan and Corregidor. MacArthur's efforts to persuade Hart to break the blockade were to no avail. Finally, on 9 January 1942, MacArthur wired General George Marshall at the War Department, stating, "Hart maintains defeatist attitude re[garding] Philippines. . . . I urge steps be taken to obtain more aggressive handling of naval forces in this area."[30] Whether Hart could actually have broken through Japanese-controlled seas, which by then extended south of the Dutch East Indies, is unlikely given the age, number, and capabilities of his modest forces. The effect on unity of effort was obvious: MacArthur's sole focus was the Philippines' defense; Hart was taking a broader view consistent with orders he was receiving from the Navy Department. [31] On 30 January 1942, in response to MacArthur's stinging comments, however, the War Department placed MacArthur in charge of all forces in the Philippines, including naval assets.[32]

Such a striking difference in aims is unlikely between U.S. forces today, but the potential for working at cross-purposes is high for multinational forces where supporting and supported commanders might be operating under different sets of priorities established by their national governments. As recently as 1999 in Kosovo, we have seen how multinational forces do not always work with true unity of effort. When directed to capture Pristina Airport, the British commander refused the direction of the U.S. commander in charge of the operation.

In the Philippines, communication was also a major inhibitor to effective command and control. The Filipino people are multilingual. Troops within hastily activated PA divisions spoke a variety of languages and dialects. For example, in the 11th Infantry Regiment, personnel spoke 11 dialects— five within one company alone. Tagalog- speaking officers from central Luzon could not communicate with troops speaking the Ilocano (mountain) dialect.

To facilitate command and control of PA divisions, MacArthur directed officers from U.S. forces to serve as trainers and advisers in PA units. The U.S. officers often had to rely on native translators where available.[33] Orders to the units would come down in English, but they still needed to be translated into Spanish, Tagalog, or any of the other dialects used by commonwealth troops. This communication challenge led to delay; inaccurate relay of commands and instructions; and outright confusion and frustration. Even today, skilled multilingual officers and specialists within the U.S military are scarce, and it must often rely on other forces that can speak and read English.

Command and control at the operational level leading up and into the Bataan Campaign was horrendous. Orders were often miscommunicated because of language problems. Orders in the U.S. chain of command, which contravened MacArthur's dictum to defend the beaches, had to go all the way to him for resolution because his intent was not questioned. Only when MacArthur reinstated WPO-3 did the forces have a common reference point, but by then the stage was set for the logistics nightmare on the Bataan Peninsula.

Logistics played a key role in the final outcome of the Bataan Campaign and the eventual surrender of American and Philippine forces. According to joint doctrine, modern logistics operations are predicated on seven principles: simplicity, flexibility, economy, survivability, sustainability, responsiveness, and adequacy. The Bataan Campaign was lost because these principles were violated wholesale. MacArthur's strategic decision to defend at the beaches did not allow his logisticians leeway to properly plan for distributing critical supplies. Many supplies and much equipment necessary to support the defense of Bataan were lost at forward supply depots, military installations, or the Manila area. Some stockpiles were lost to the Japanese, but withdrawing forces destroyed the majority.[34] Without sufficient supplies—especially food and equipment— the Bataan defenders were doomed.

Positioning of Supplies

Positioning of supplies did not allow for flexibility and survivability in the face of invading Japanese forces. MacArthur's plan for the aggressive defense of Luzon led to the dispersion of assets from quartermaster depots in the Manila area to four advance depots (three on Luzon, one on Cebu) in direct support of forces. Each Luzon depot was to stock 15 days of Class I (subsistence) and Class II (clothing and equipment) supplies.[35] No plans were in place to retrieve forward supplies because MacArthur's intent was clearly to defend forward. WPO-3 was "discarded as far as Bataan was concerned." [36] WPO-3 had called for

stocking Bataan with 180 days of supplies for a garrison of 43,000 troops, but the quartermaster's instructions were that "under no circumstance would any defense supplies be placed on Bataan."[37]

When MacArthur at last implemented WPO-3, the majority of the forward stores were lost. The Tarlac Advance Depot quartermaster, supporting the North Luzon force, broke his supplies up into division-size lots before withdrawing in the hopes that retreating units could grab them on the run. What could not be carried was destroyed in place. Quartermaster operations at existing military bases were also caught up in the chaos. At Fort Stotsenburg, 250,000 gallons of gasoline were destroyed because there was no time or transport to remove it. While sitting in the rail yards at San Fernando, Guagua, and Lubao, 70 rail cars of supplies, including 6 artillery pieces and 10 cars of 155-millimeter artillery ammunition were lost to enemy air attack.[38]

A rapidly deteriorating transportation infrastructure complicated efforts to move supplies to Bataan. Drake was responsible for organizing the movement of additional supplies to Bataan once WPO-3 went into effect. He estimated that in uninterrupted and good conditions, it would take 14 days of 24-hour operations to relocate supplies from Manila to Bataan.[39] By this time, however, the transportation infrastructure was in shambles.

The Army depended on the Manila Railroad for moving the bulk of supplies, but by 15 December, enemy air attacks had degraded rail operations. By Christmas, not one locomotive was in operation.[40]

Motor transport resources were limited and under constant threat of air attack. About 1,000 vehicles had been appropriated from Manila when the war began. Many of these were commandeered by American and Philippine officers desperate to acquire transport for their units.[41] By the time the Motor Transport Service established operations in Bataan on 1 January 1942, only 18 vehicles remained.[42]

Transportation of supplies to Bataan and Corregidor was accomplished ad hoc by water and by highway from Manila.[43] The primary quartermaster effort was made by water using all available launches, tugs, and barges. There was difficulty keeping sufficient stevedores on the job based on the ever-present air threat, but the Luzon Stevedoring Company, with civilian volunteers, was enlisted to help keep supplies moving.[44] In the end, this effort was inadequate to support the more than 100,000 troops, refugees, and laborers in Bataan.

Simplicity was not possible in the scramble to supply Bataan. On 6 January 1942, half-rationing was implemented. Each person received half of the nearly 4,000 calories required to sustain an active person. By mid-February, the amount had been reduced to only 1,000 calories per person per day.[45] Economy was perhaps the only principle of logistics not violated.

Resupply operations to Bataan and Corregidor were largely unsuccessful. No large resupply force dared attempt to break the Japanese blockade of the island. Some supplies made it to Cebu where they were loaded onto blockade-runners (fishing ships and small, fast coastal craft) for a dash up to Luzon and into Manila Bay. This tactic was rarely successful. Some supplies were smuggled in via submarine, but the quantities were too small to make a difference. Only about another 4 days of supplies for the force of 100,000 ever made it through.[46] The lack of sufficient maritime assets to force the blockade meant that resupply operations into Bataan and Corregidor were neither responsive nor sustainable.

Innovation, an unofficial principle of logistics, was applied successfully by Bataan quartermasters. The peninsula had few natural resources, but it was not destitute. Local slaughtering operations were set up to provide meat from indigenous animals. Water buffalo, horses, mules, cattle, and pigs provided almost 3 million pounds of meat to the defenders. In addition, a fishing center yielded up to 12,000 pounds of fish daily until the Japanese managed to intimidate the local fishermen into quitting. Fresh water was available, and up to 400 pounds of salt per day (for preservation) was generated by boiling seawater. Great efforts were made to gather palay from the countryside, and some rice mills were established to process it, but the total effort yielded only another 150,000 pounds of processed rice.[47] By February, however, almost all avenues were exhausted, and the defenders had to rely only on what they had managed to stockpile.

Thorough Lack of Planning

The decision to revert to WPO-3 reflected a thorough lack of planning, preparation, and communication with regard to movement of supplies. Indeed, USAFFE failed to account for any possibility other than victory at the beaches; no other options were considered. When the defense crumbled, the logistics operation crumbled with it. Only innovative, resourceful logistics support enabled the defenders to hold out until April on Bataan and May on Corregidor.

The American and Philippine forces' ability to hold out against superior Japanese forces for nearly 5 months, from the main Japanese landings in December 1941 until Wainwright's surrender in May, is a testament to the courage and tenacity of these fine soldiers. By a quirk of strategic policy and unfortunate timing, they became isolated, without supplies, equipment, or training necessary to perform their missions. Despite great personal hardship, their determination to resist kept them going.

Probably U.S. forces today will never face conditions as extreme as the conditions that the soldiers on Bataan faced in April 1942. But military leaders at all levels should appreciate lessons learned from this campaign.

Developing a campaign plan must account for all eventualities; one cannot assume mission success, which comes from planning and understanding capabilities and limitations as well as the enemy's. Commanders must communicate their intent to subordinates in such a way as to allow them some degree of autonomy, including developing fallback options. Open communications must extend vertically and horizontally within military forces. Logistics planning must be tied directly to operational planning. Branch and sequel options accounted for in the operational planning process must be tested in the logistics planning process to determine if they are supportable.

In the future, we will likely operate more closely with various nations and within multinational coalitions. We cannot expect all forces to bring the same level of experience and training to the fight. We must consider carefully how best to leverage their unique capabilities for a common objective; how we can enhance communication; and what are appropriate missions for them. Many of our allies speak English as a second language, yet few U.S. personnel are trained in other languages. Can we efficiently and effectively integrate other nations' forces placed under our command? What will be the common mechanism? In many cases, the Philippine forces in Bataan could not even communicate with one another. How would we, as the foremost military in the world, deal with this situation? It is a daunting challenge.

The surrender of forces in the Philippines was the largest ever surrender of U.S. forces to a foreign power. The 76,000 American and Philippine troops who surrendered in Bataan were sick from malaria and other jungle diseases and wasted from malnutrition. They were marched from their point of surrender 65 miles to the Japanese prisoner camp at Camp O'Donnell. Only 54,000 survived. Many later died of disease, malnutrition, or torture. Many died aboard the "hellships" that took many of the American survivors to Japan.[48]

We have heard many times the refrain, "No more Task Force Smiths," in reference to the defeat of the unprepared U.S. forces at the beginning of the Korean conflict. Maybe we should draw from an earlier, more brutal lesson and cry out, "No more Bataans, *ever*!"***MR***

NOTES

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